



A Community Led Plan for Earlston

June 2018

Contents

1	Background.....	1
2	Consultation Findings	3
3	Actions Needed	7

This plan has been produced by Earlston Community Council and the wider community in the Earlston area, with the support of Iconic Consulting. We are extremely grateful to Scottish Borders Council for funding the consultation and development of the plan. We are also thankful to A Forsyth, I Gibb and C Welsh for supplying photographs.



Earlston

Living in the present – planning for the future

1 BACKGROUND

Earlston is a vibrant community located at the heart of the picturesque Scottish Borders countryside, with a population of just 1,800 it has a village atmosphere valued by residents that we want to retain.

The village has a range of services and facilities including a supermarket, petrol station, independent retailers, pubs, cafes, a pharmacy, and a health centre. Earlston Parish Church can trace its origins back to the twelfth century, and a separate church hall is available for community use. However, the local post office closed in 2017 and this followed the earlier closure of the only bank and dentist. The Green is at the centre of the village and overlooks several traditional stone-built homes and buildings dating back to the nineteenth century. The most notable of these is the Reading Rooms which has historical significance but has been unused for decades. As well as The Green, there are other greenspaces locally such as the public park at the Haugh, next to the Leader Water.



Earlston is situated on the A68 with good links to Edinburgh just over 30 miles north and Jedburgh about 14 miles south. The opening of the Borders Railway between Edinburgh and Tweedbank in 2015 provides a link to Scotland's rail network. Borders Buses run several services to other Borders' towns and to Edinburgh.

Earlston is home to three good schools. Earlston High School has just over 1,000 pupils serving several Borders communities as well as the village itself. The High School moved to a new purpose-built campus on the eastern edge of the village in 2009 and includes a library and community meeting space. Earlston Primary School has approximately 170 pupils as well as nursery provision. Scottish Borders Council (SBC) has prioritised the primary school for investment and hopes to source Scottish Government funding to deliver intergenerational learning opportunities. Earlston is also home to Leader Valley School which opened in 2017 for pupils with additional support needs from across the Borders. Active Parent Councils encourage links between the schools, parents, pupils and wider community. East Green Nursery and Out of School Club adds to early years education and childcare provision in Earlston.



Earlston has an active community sector with numerous groups and societies covering various interests and age groups including older people, young people, local history, physical activity and the environment. There are a range of events throughout the year including Civic Week in July which is approaching its 50th anniversary, the Christmas Lights, Earlston 7s rugby



tournament, and a Community Day in August. The Church & Community Magazine is delivered to all homes three times a year and has contributions from many local groups and societies.

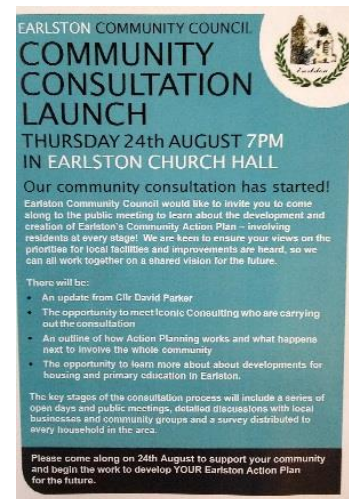
The Earlston area has a mix of more than one hundred businesses ranging from significant employers with local staff to numerous home-based businesses. Retail businesses include small independents as well as a supermarket. There are two industrial estates - Rhymers Mill and Earlston - housing a range of businesses. There are also several farms in the surrounding countryside. While some residents work locally, others commute to workplaces across the Borders and beyond.

Development of this community-led plan

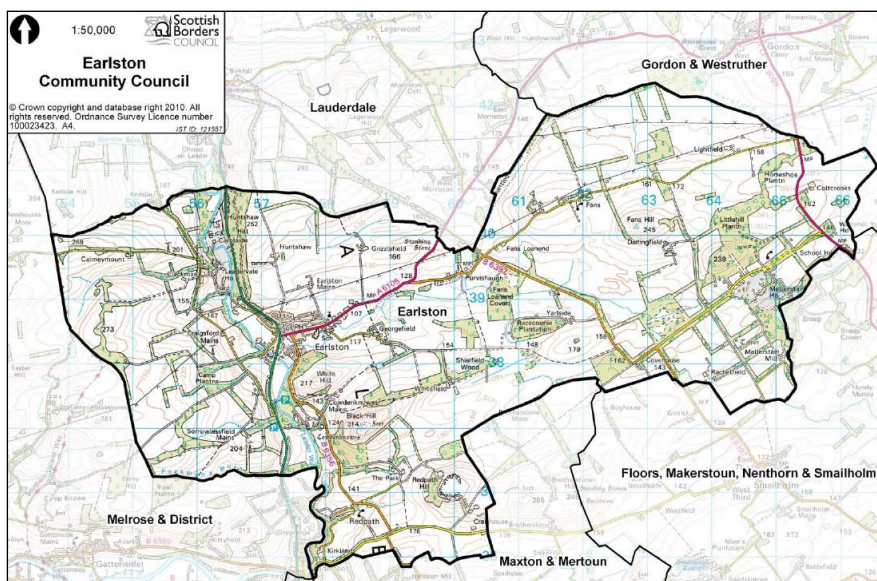
A steering group of volunteers was formed under the auspices of Earlston Community Council to help build the plan and subsequently to gain wide support for a series of agreed, achievable actions and ownership of a shared vision for the future of the village.

With the aid of SBC funding, a team of external professionals undertook a broad consultation programme between August and December 2017 involving:

- A public meeting to launch the consultation process.
- Attendance at the Community Day.
- A household survey completed by 324 residents.
- Business consultation involving 25 local employers.
- Meetings with 14 community groups and societies.
- Consultation with hundreds of Earlston High School pupils undertaken by a dozen 'peer researchers' from the school.
- An interactive session with Earlston Primary School pupils.
- Discussions with organisations including SBC and Eildon Housing Association.



Coverage of this community-led plan

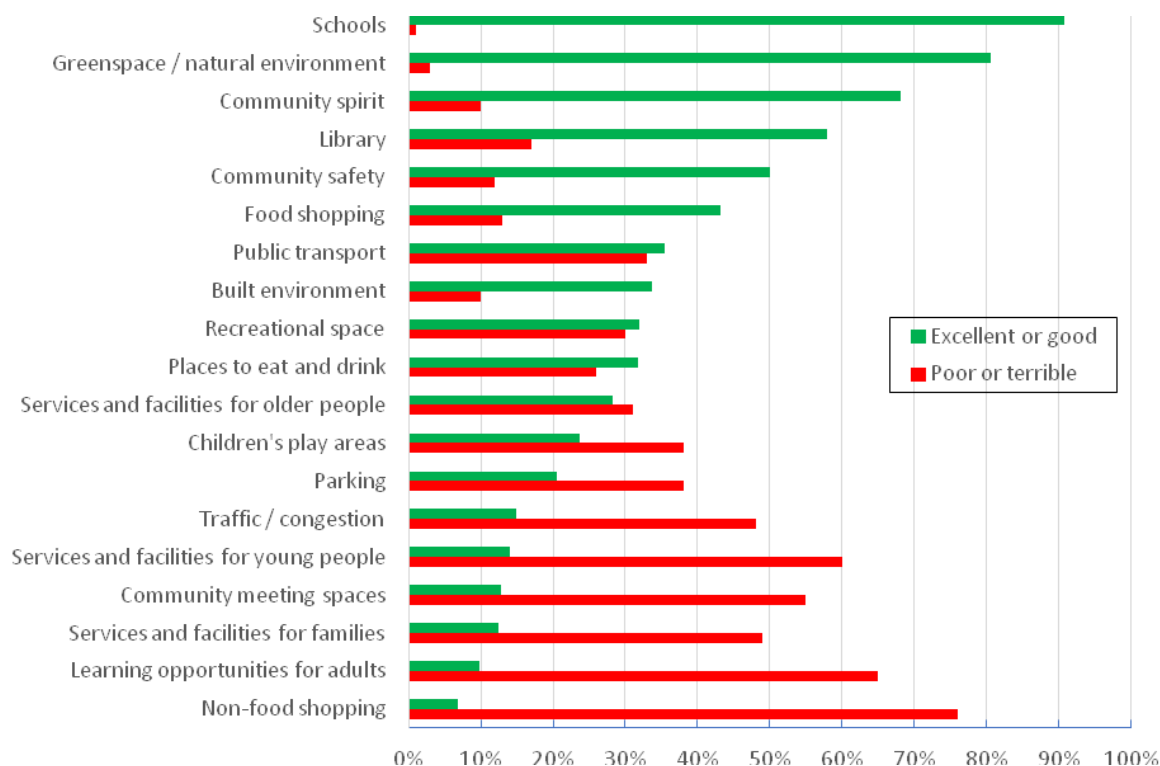


This plan mirrors the boundary of Earlston Community Council. It covers the village of Earlston and the surrounding area, from the path of the Southern Upland Way in the west to Mellerstain House in the east, and from Carolside in the north to Redpath in the south.

2 CONSULTATION FINDINGS

WHAT WE LIKE AND DISLIKE ABOUT EARLSTON

Residents scored some issues in Earlston much more positively than others, as shown below.



LIKES

The three local **schools** all have excellent reputations and are regarded as one of Earlston's most valued assets with 91% of residents judging them as excellent or good. This view was consistently supported during the consultation process including among young people themselves with pupils ranking it as one of the things they like most about the area. The presence of hundreds of High School pupils from neighbouring towns and villages adds to the vitality of Earlston and helps to sustain local businesses, including food outlets. **Food shopping** was rated as one of Earlston's strengths.

Greenspace and the natural environment was very highly regarded with 81% of residents rating it as either excellent or good. Many residents highlighted the ease of access to the local countryside and use it regularly to cycle or walk. Similarly, young people considered greenspace and the natural environment as one of the most positive aspects of life in Earlston (as well as public transport, and places to eat and drink).

"We're really lucky, we've got great schools right here in the village".

"There's a good range of services/shops in the village".

"Beautiful scenery encourages a feeling of wellbeing. The Paths Group, all volunteers, work hard to ensure that there are well maintained walks of varied lengths and difficulties that are well used by both residents and visitors".

Earlston is a strong and vibrant community with approximately two thirds of residents citing **community spirit** as either excellent or good. Countless numbers of local people commented on how “*everyone knows everyone*”, how people look out for each other, and on the quality of life in Earlston. The number and variety of **community groups and organisations** was also a positive feature that consultees repeatedly commented on. Overall, the community spirit and pride are assets that will help the community take forward this Plan.

Earlston is regarded by residents as a safe place which adds to the quality of life. The majority of residents viewed **community safety** as excellent or good.

The number and range of **local businesses** was widely regarded as another of the village’s strengths. The business survey provided an insight into the views of local businesses and it demonstrated that closeness to home and family was the main reason why most are located in Earlston. The availability of land and premises was also important. A majority of businesses consider the area to be a very good or good business base and the main positive aspects of operating in Earlston were seen as the accessible location, sense of community, a large and loyal customer base, sense of security, and the local environment.

“There’s a very good community spirit, Earlston still has a village atmosphere with friendly people and good neighbours”.

“The commitment of local groups such as the Paths Group, Christmas Lights Group and Civic Week etc. is amazing”.

“It’s a quiet town which is relatively crime free and is great area for bringing up a family”.

“There are good transport connections - road, bus and close access to the Borders railway”.

DISLIKES

Two thirds of residents scored **adult learning opportunities** as poor or terrible. Numerous members of the community groups and societies also reported there was a lack of learning activities for adults and they would welcome such opportunities in the future. Scottish Borders Council’s stated aim of developing intergenerational learning opportunities as part of the new primary school was viewed as an opportunity to address this issue.

Overall 55% of residents ranked **community meeting spaces** as poor or terrible. Community groups highlighted issues with the availability, cost, accessibility, and storage facilities of existing venues, and the community reported there were limited venues for social activities and events.

“If you want to do an evening class or a course you can’t do it here”.

“There’s no village hall or community centre for groups to use or for people to have parties in”.

“Large and fast traffic using High Street”.

Heavy **traffic and congestion** on the High Street was a major concern. 48% of residents regarded traffic/congestion as poor or terrible and school pupils raised it as one of the main things they disliked about Earlston. Heavy goods vehicles including agricultural vehicles were seen as a constant problem including at night and in the early hours of the morning. In addition, dozens of buses drop-off and pick-up pupils from the High School on a daily basis during term time. This leads to delays for other road users who are held up as the road layout and parked cars mean they cannot pass, as well as concern for pedestrian safety especially as the pavements narrow in places. Whilst parking on the High Street and The Green is free, there was a view that parking was problematic and 38% of residents rated it as poor or terrible. Businesses also reported that parking can be difficult for deliveries, or customers with mobility problems.

Displeasure at the **closure of Earlston's post office** in 2017 was a recurring and significant issue throughout the consultation. The closure had meant people travelling elsewhere. It was also seen as the loss of a community asset which had previously generated social interaction and cohesion in Earlston. On a positive note, a twice weekly mobile Post Office service has recently been introduced.

Although more than half of residents scored Earlston **library** as excellent or good, concerns were raised about its accessibility given its location in the High School. There was a view that the distance and limited public transport links, impacted on use by older people, people with disabilities, those who cannot drive, and families with young children.

Although the community held a very positive view of the natural environment, just under a third of residents considered **recreation space** as poor or terrible. **Litter and dog fouling** were also seen by some as detracting from Earlston's pleasant environment. Some consultees linked litter to the presence of school pupils during the day and felt young people should therefore be encouraged to be part of the solution.

Local services and facilities were judged poor or terrible for young people (60%), families (49%) and older people (31%). Young people suggested there were limited things for them to do and this view was echoed by some members of community groups. The consultation also highlighted concerns with **non-food shopping** provision.

Although a third of residents viewed **public transport** as excellent or good, a similar proportion rated it as poor or terrible. The consultation found that the times and destinations sometimes limited what some residents, particularly older people and young people, could do. Specific issues included linking into the Borders Railway via Tweedbank Station and young

"Congestion in the town due to onstreet parking in bad places, and there are no cycle paths".

"Earlston is tremendously lucky to have a butcher, a bread shop, chemist, petrol station, supermarket, hairdresser and choices of places to eat, drink, purchase fast food. But no bank or post office".

"People don't mix, the library is so far from town I need to get a taxi there, and the bus service at night is very bad".

"The litter dropped by school children at lunch times".

"Lack of shops for items other than groceries".

"Not enough for children and young adults to do"

"Lack of integrated public transport i.e. bus links to Tweedbank station".

people returning to Earlston from other Borders towns in the evenings. Several consultees noted that **community transport** options were limited.

Limited **broadband access** and subsequent reliance on slower, less reliable internet connections was a significant issue for the community and businesses which affected online communication and transactions.

Housing was also an issue with some people reporting difficulty in finding suitable houses to rent or buy. There was a perception that young people and older people were most affected and could lead to some having to move out of the village.



3 ACTIONS NEEDED

EARLSTON – OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

This community-led plan sets out a shared vision of how the local community would like Earlston to develop and change for the future. The actions listed below are the ones we think are needed to make this a reality and we hope to make progress on them within 3 to 5 years.

We want to make Earlston, a close knit and caring community, an even better place to live, work, study and spend leisure time.

The community feedback has identified three key themes for this community-led plan. They are:

Theme 1: Good community facilities and activities

Theme 2: An attractive, safe and welcoming place to live in and visit

Theme 3: A good place to do business, train and work

MAKING IT HAPPEN

The responsibility for taking actions forward locally will lie with local residents, organisations, businesses and our public partners such as Scottish Borders Council - all working together to achieve the same goals. As a first step and to maintain the momentum generated from the development of this Plan, we will establish Steering Groups responsible for taking forward the actions. Each group will consist of representatives from Earlston Community Council and various community groups, local businesses and public organisations to ensure we work together to make Earlston and the surrounding area an even better place to live, work, study and spend leisure time. Community Council members on each Group will regularly report progress back to the Community Council.

GOOD COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

There is widespread support for a dedicated community facility that is centrally located, accessible to the community at all times, affordable, and sizeable. In total 86% of residents supported developing a dedicated community facility, with 76% supporting its inclusion in any redevelopment of Earlston Primary School. The building of a new school is regarded by many as a unique opportunity to create a dedicated community base for a wide range of services and activities.

Generally, the community is very supportive of plans to redevelop the Primary School even though no detailed information is yet available nor wider consultation taken place. Many views were expressed about specific aspects of the new school including maintaining the current village centre location, making it an exemplar of energy efficiency and sustainability, and prioritising pedestrian access. Parents of children at East Green Nursery and Out of School Club are supportive but keen to retain their own space and independence.

The community also want to see local services and activities improved. This includes intergenerational services that bring the community together (an idea initially raised by young people), improved adult learning opportunities, and high speed broadband access. Young people's services are a priority and ideas suggested include a youth café, a pump track, and a children's play area. Scottish Borders Council has already confirmed funding from Eildon Housing Association's proposed social housing development on the former High School site will be made available for a play area elsewhere in the village. Redeveloping the play area at East Green as part of the primary school redevelopment was suggested by residents as an option.

In total 96% of residents supported the post office's reinstatement. The introduction of a mobile service since the consultation was completed has met with positive local feedback.

Community groups expressed the desire and need to recruit more volunteers, particularly younger ones. In turn, those groups might then benefit from support to address skills gaps such as funding, marketing, communication and partnership working and look to improve information on the local community groups and societies.

Key Activities

1. Research and establish options to develop dedicated community facilities
2. Ensure community participation in the planning and consultation for new primary school
3. Work to expand services and amenities for the community
4. Put volunteers and volunteering into the heart of community

The Next Steps

1 - Research and establish options to develop dedicated community facilities

Carry out an audit to establish existing community meetings spaces, sustainable models elsewhere, and if required potential options (new-build, conversion, and community buy-out) including costs and funding.

2 - Ensure community participation in the planning and consultation for new primary school

- a. Identify and support appropriate local representatives as members of SBC primary school working party.
- b. Ensure representation of local views and that inclusion of community facilities, adult learning opportunities, public library, and children's play area are fully addressed and assessed by SBC during planning process.

3 – Work to expand services and amenities for the community

- a. Lead activity with community groups, youth groups and schools to jointly develop intergenerational activities focused on e.g. local history, the environment, arts & crafts.
- b. Campaign with SBC for BT to provide improved broadband capacity.
- c. Investigate level of long term need and sustainable support for services e.g. for a youth café and pump track including location, costs, funding and ongoing maintenance and management.

4 - Put volunteers and volunteering at the heart of the community

- a. Identify key community volunteers and promote volunteering opportunities.
- b. Promote access to and use of existing support services for community groups available at The Bridge in Galashiels.
- c. Research the possibility for local ownership and development of accurate and regularly updated and maintained, comprehensive community website.
- d. Work with local residents to develop a project allowing them to give practical help and support to each other using their skills and knowledge, commonly called "time banking".

AN ATTRACTIVE, SAFE AND WELCOMING PLACE TO LIVE IN AND VISIT

Residents, including young people, wanted Earlston to be an attractive and welcoming place to live and visit. Improving traffic and parking problems are seen as priorities with 80% of residents supporting improvements to the road and pavement layout on the High Street. Suggestions put forward include applying a 20mph speed limit throughout the day, introducing traffic calming measures, creating a pedestrian crossing near the Primary School, developing pedestrian friendly walking routes leading to the High School, and encouraging school children to walk from the main bus station or to cycle to school.

The community expressed the wish to add planters, pots, hanging baskets and flower beds along the High Street, and throughout the village - a proposal supported by 78% of residents. They have concerns about litter and dog fouling and suggested more bins, a community clean-up day, and a volunteer-led litter squad.

Some consultees, particularly young people, highlighted the lack of cycle paths in and around Earlston and three quarter of replies supported the creation of cycle paths. There is also support for additional walking paths in and around Earlston and for an outdoor or green gym.

Improving public and community transport is also a priority with 80% of residents supporting any future proposals for a community transport initiative or community bus. There is interest in utilising buses which could, for example, be hired by community groups, provide a service to/from the library or to other towns.

The renovation of the historic Reading Rooms building in the village centre was raised with suggested uses including a community facility, museum, youth facility, or café, although it is recognised that ownership must be established before any plans could be explored. There is also support for housing development with 61% supporting housing for rent or sale specifically designed for older people, 54% housing for rent, and 45% new housing for sale. The former site of Earlston High School has been earmarked for the development of approximately 55 social housing units by Eildon Housing Association.

Encouraging tourism is supported by 72% of residents, as well as many businesses, recognising this would help boost the local economy. Specific suggestions include promotion of the area, a local museum, shared studio space for local artists and crafters, and a more vibrant High Street.

Key Activities

1. Address concerns for traffic, parking and pedestrians on the High Street
2. Establish plans and teams to enhance Earlston's appearance
3. Increase opportunities for outdoor recreation
4. Investigate and establish options and long term demand for improved public and community transport services
5. Support and be involved in plans for appropriate housing development
6. Work with local businesses and groups to put Earlston on the Borders' tourism map

The Next Steps

1 - Address concerns for traffic, parking and pedestrian problems on the High Street

Work with Scottish Borders Council to address concerns and support any improvements based on a comprehensive review to tackle traffic, parking and pedestrian access on the High Street.

2 – Establish plans to enhance Earlston’s appearance

- a. Establish and support volunteers to introduce and maintain “green” improvements in Earlston.
- b. Implement plans for community clean-up days and volunteer litter squads.
- c. If appropriate, develop a long term plan for the Reading Rooms covering ownership, end use, costs and funding.

3 - Increase opportunities for outdoor recreation

- a. Develop proposals and plans for an outdoor or green gym including location, funding and ongoing maintenance.
- b. If agreed, work with appropriate groups and organisations to create a green gym for Earlston.

4 - Investigate and establish options and long term demand for improved public and community transport services

- a. Assess community transport options (including combined school and community transport services) in conjunction with partners such as The Bridge Community Transport Initiative.
- b. Assess long term demand for public transport and if required, explore with public transport commissioners and providers to enhance services, including links to Borders Railway.

5 - Support and be involved in plans for appropriate housing development

Earlston Community Council to work with Scottish Borders Council to support appropriate housing development, securing developer contributions to take forward community actions and ensuring the development addresses community needs.

6 - Work with local businesses to put Earlston on the Borders’ tourism map

Work with local businesses to promote Earlston as a tourism destination, exploring and costing options such as website and leaflet showcasing Earlston, as well as all other tourism-related opportunities.

A GOOD PLACE TO DO BUSINESS, TRAIN AND WORK

Local businesses that took part in the consultation supported more networking opportunities and specific suggestions include establishing an Earlston Business Club to regularly share information, advice and support, as well as developing an online directory of local businesses. Local businesses also suggested business support that better meets their needs.

In response to difficulties recruiting well trained, reliable and skilled staff, almost all businesses support proposals to develop the young workforce. They would like to make greater use of apprenticeship schemes and offer more work placements to Earlston High School pupils.

The idea of a small business centre was seen positively by most businesses and the community with 61% of residents in agreement, whether as a physical or online presence. Local businesses also saw improvements to high speed broadband access and reinstatement of the local post office service as priorities.

Key Activities

1. Encourage businesses to develop networking and support
2. Assess and, if required, plan for a small business centre
3. Encourage opportunities for skills development

The next steps

1 – Encourage businesses to develop networking and support

- a. Encourage establishment of an Earlston Business Club with regular networking events.
- b. Investigate support for, and develop, an online directory of local businesses.
- c. Support local businesses to source opportunities provided by Business Gateway.

2 – Assess and, if required, plan for a small business centre

- a. Carry out exercise to assess the feasibility of developing a small business centre in Earlston by scoping out services, level of sustainable demand, cost and funding options.
- b. If appropriate, create and establish local centre.

3 - Encourage opportunities for skills development

- a. Support Earlston High School and local businesses in developing work placement opportunities.
- b. Increase adult learning opportunities, in conjunction with relevant agencies and organisations.

This Community Led Plan was born out of out of the community's desire to improve life in Earlston for everyone. It provides a focus for our energies and will help unite us together in moving forward with our hopes and aspirations for Earlston. The Plan will need a lot of hard work, commitment and will depend on the dedication and the support of people throughout Earlston. There is a lot to do, everyone will have a lot to learn but the potential rewards in making Earlston a better place to live, work in or visit are great.

